

In solitary pursuit: singles, sex war and the search for love, 1977–1983

Article (Accepted Version)

Strimpel, Zoe (2017) In solitary pursuit: singles, sex war and the search for love, 1977–1983. *Cultural and Social History*, 14 (5). pp. 691-715. ISSN 1478-0038

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/70559/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

In Solitary Pursuit: *Singles*, Sex War and the Search for Love, 1977–1983

Zoe Strimpel

School of History, Art History and Philosophy, The University of Sussex, UK

ABSTRACT

This article suggests that by breaking away from the couples-centric lens normally deployed by historians of intimacy, and instead focusing on the experience of single people, historians gain fresh insight into a key transition point in the late twentieth century history of relationships. Singles, particularly those actively seeking partners, were particularly hard-pressed to digest the implications of a decade of sexual rights campaigns, because, more explicitly than couples, they had to articulate what they wanted out of the opposite sex, both to themselves and to prospective partners. In paying close attention to the articulations and experiences of singles, we gain fresh purchase on how the sexual legacies of the 1970s began to be digested, resisted and repurposed. This article makes a case for doing so through the privileged access provided by *Singles*, a magazine that brought together the experiences of a cross-section of mostly heterosexual, unmarried Britons at a moment of significant sexual reordering. The author explores how the magazine set out to help singles navigate the new landscape by fostering a shared singles identity, and then how that project buckled under the intensity of disagreement about gender roles. Examination of the *Singles* debates around dating and gender suggests that the contemporaneous efforts of ordinary people to process the new sexual languages of the 1970s were more intense and conflicted than the existing historiography has yet allowed, and that much of the sexual antagonism felt by men and women facing each other across the lonely hearts pages stemmed from gendered anxieties about economic standing.

For Dr Tony Lake, a consultant psychologist writing in *Singles Magazine* in 1977, loneliness caused by heterosexual singleness had reached the status of a chronic, widespread social ‘disease’ in Britain.¹ Lake had no doubt dramatised his findings for journalistic reasons, but he was right to draw attention to the growth in number of a new group: ‘singles’.² The new singles lacked the old definitiveness of ‘bachelors’ or ‘spinsters’, identities that, as Katherine Holden has argued, were often understood in strict relation to that of married people.³ Spanning ‘widely different lifestages’, from never-married under 40s to the divorced and the elderly and widowed, singles were a disparate social group, difficult to pinpoint and awkwardly positioned against ‘society’s ambivalence to the idea of living alone’.⁴ This article does not attempt to interrogate the experience of romantic solitude throughout British society, a project which – following a rich social survey tradition – would require serious focus on the conditions facing the elderly and poor.⁵ Rather, my focus here is on a self-defined ‘single’ population of people directly influenced by the changes of the 1960s: divorcees, single mothers, young people delaying marriage or for whom marriage was delayed, and those who felt left out of or affronted by the ‘permissive’ society and sexual liberation campaigns. My source for understanding the pressures facing this group is *Singles Magazine*, which ran under various names between 1977 and 2004, but whose editorial content was richest between 1977 and 1983. *Singles* represented the growing number of singles who, around the turn of the 1980s, were engaging with their solo romantic status and seeking to change it. These people were not necessarily young, but they were actively sexually and romantically hopeful; they were also generally within a framework of social aspiration that saw them struggling against professional and social stagnation, both of which threatened the selfconfidence many felt was required to meet someone.

Such singles at the end of the 1970s faced a new, potentially free-floating individualism, informed by a post-Pill paradigm of sexual plenty and soaring divorce as well as older enduring notions of

romantic tradition. They represented a new market, too: a growing, cottage- style matchmaking industry in Britain was offering singles a choice between the services of a computer dating firm such as Dateline or Compudate, one of many introduction agencies and the lonely hearts pages of Private Eye, Time Out and others.⁶ Marketing tools were also developed to assist in better understanding the spending patterns of this growing group. ACORN (1977), for instance, developed by market research firm CACI, and SAGACITY (1981) deployed for the first time a system of 'lifestyle segmentations', including 'affluent single metropolitan dwellers'.⁷ Older and less affluent singles' spending was not ignored either, though it wasn't until 1992 that a high-profile report, Mintel's 'Single Person Households', would carefully assess the spending habits of lonely pensioners alongside those of younger singles.⁸

Yet if by the late 1970s and early 1980s, entrepreneurs had decided that singleness was good business and a humming media discourse emphasised a raft of new freedoms available to the sexually independent, single people themselves were far from clear on where they stood at this juncture. Beyond the mechanics of how to meet a partner, many men and women struggled to interpret the new codes of sexual behaviour that had evolved in the preceding decade. Women's and gay rights discourse and the conservative moral right had competing views about sex and monogamy, while new reproductive technologies and legislation and the availability of no-fault divorce after the 1969 Divorce Reform Act challenged older models of commitment. The number of divorces rose from 50,000 in 1970 to 150,000 in 1980, and rose further after the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act in 1984, which further reduced obstacles to divorce; the latter stabilised at around 170,000 in 1992.⁹

Romantic practice throughout the 1970s and 1980s was a contested field: sexual freedom was hailed alongside commentary about the importance of restraint, responsibility and family.¹⁰ Yet little was said about what this meant for people without romantic partners and, in many cases, without sexual partners either. Singles were left to interpret the sexual legacy of the 1970s in relation to the conditions of their own lives, a project made all the more urgent by the need to articulate their romantic expectations to themselves and others in ways not expected of the romantically committed.¹¹ Crucially, this articulation was intimately bound up with a vision of the desired play of gender roles within a potential relationship, and could thus be painfully fraught.

Singles magazine, the lens used throughout this study, offers new purchase on a key moment in the late twentieth century history sexual relationships. While the impact of feminist ideas on heterosexual relationships in the 1970s has been explored in a number of activists' memoirs, contemporaneous responses to those ideas by people outside of activist networks or the Left have been relatively invisible.¹² The magazine provided a generous space for just such responses. Importantly, it is my vehicle for a rare case study demonstrating the ways in which people not only outside, but who felt themselves excluded from and opposed to, the period's liberation movements responded to new activist lexicons in relation to their own lives and relationships. Moreover, if they were not involved in left-wing politics, nor did *Singles* readers appear to be part of organised 'new Right' activism, another focus of scholarship on the 1970s and 1980s. Their focus in letters was on the injustices of daily life in relation to their personal relationships and purses: not in mobilising for or against specific campaigns.¹³ *Singles* therefore contributes a much-needed viewfinder of a period whose historical literature is dominated by activist histories, often focusing on the intellectual cosmos of the leaders rather than on observers.

Singles was not the only cultural outlet interested in the experiences and viewpoints of single people at this time. Agony columns continued to be among the most popular sections of newspapers: in 1974, Claire Rayner, the *Sun*'s agony aunt, estimated that she received up to 1500 per week, while in 1976, Marje Proops quoted the number of people who had written to her at one million.¹⁴

Contemporaneous with documentaries such as *LonelyHearts* (Thames Television, 1977) and *The Love Tapes* (New Decade Films, 1979), which soberly investigated London's crop of the young and desperately lonely, *Singles* also overlapped with an expanded range of girls and women's magazines. Among the most successful were *Jackie* (launched 1964), *Cosmopolitan* (launched 1972) and *Company* (launched 1978) as well as the longer running *Woman's Own*, all of which focused on the interplay of gender-political change, sex and relationships.¹⁵ Like *Singles*, they contained letters, editorials and first-person viewpoints, but unlike *Singles*, content was directed at (though not entirely read by) women.¹⁶

However, such magazines were not primarily forums for intra-reader debate in the letters' pages, and this is reflected in the scholarship on them. The key texts on girls and women's magazines focus on representations rather than reception and reader experience.¹⁷ In analysing the construction of femininity in *Jackie*, a central plank of which was dating etiquette, McRobbie zoned in on 'a system of messages, a signifying system' rather than the way its audience articulated their own dating experience.¹⁸ The same emphasis is apparent in the studies of consumption, masculinity and sexuality in men's magazines that elucidate the dynamics forged between editorial and advertising imperatives.¹⁹ Thus, if the semiotics of women's and men's magazines are well accounted for, reader response has been relatively sidelined, particularly in relation to men's magazine readership.²⁰ This further points to the opportunities suggested by *Singles*' extensive letters pages, especially the grasp offered on the slippery issue of reader reception. Jonathan Rose has insisted 'the importance of trying to discover how cultural products were understood by the individuals that consumed them', but, as Adrian Bingham has discussed, detailed evidence of how readers responded to publications, including national journals, is inevitably 'sketchy'.²¹ Crucially, the extraordinary intensity of *Singles*' reader opinion about contemporary relational norms was bound up with the existence of the personal ad section at the back: unlike any other magazine of the period, *Singles*' commercial plan required it to both engage with singleness as a fixed identity and provide a way out of it.

As a whole, *Singles* magazine testifies to the complexity and confusion of feeling attendant on the sex-political and legislative changes of the 1970s, particularly within the high-stakes arena of romantic relationships. Uniquely, *Singles* offered both solidarity and encounter, putting pressure on the individual and the group to forge romantic self-understanding in a novel way. The voices to emerge from it, therefore, speak with greater personal urgency and immediacy, and are less mediated than those in contemporaneous magazines like *Cosmopolitan* that were also deeply engaged with relational issues. Analysis of *Singles*, therefore, offers historians a unique route to the coalface of romantic desire among ordinary people at a time of great sexual, political and social change. Moreover, in analysing the magazine's reader responses, this article helps fill a gap in the historiography of late twentieth century sexual change, bringing to light a core set of interlinked anxieties about economic and sexual standing. These in turn get to the heart of a period in which old certainties about how to earn and spend money, structure family life and approach the opposite sex were dramatically challenged. The testimony of the people studied here offers both new insight into the way ordinary people handled these challenges, and illuminates their immediacy for those both envisioning and arranging their romantic futures.

It's a Couple's World: Historiographical Context

While historians of twentieth century Britain have been conducting a deepening affair with the subjects of love, romance and courtship, singleness has been comparatively overlooked. Indeed, the historiography of love in Britain in the last century has been 'anchored' in courtship and marriage, with the attention on relations between the sexes rather than experiences of sexual isolation.²² Katherine Holden, one of the few historians to exclusively address singleness in the twentieth

century, has drawn attention to the dearth of attention to marriage 'from the perspective of single people' in the period 1914–1960.²³ Anthea Duquenin, in her 1983 study of single women over 70, observed that the issue of singleness had been of much less interest in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth aside from enduring stereotypes about 'promiscuous young girls' or 'ambitious career women'.²⁴ One reason for this omission is that when historians have tackled singleness they have done so in relation to dominant narratives pertinent to the three major phases in question. First, for interwar Britain, Virginia Nicholson and Joanna Bourke have analysed specific types of single created by the Great War – surplus women and war-disfigured men.²⁵ Some of these studies, particularly of women, have celebrated their single state, looking for areas of agency and newfound independence. ²⁶ Historians have also been fascinated by the striking official discourses of the interwar period that urged young people to choose their partners carefully and pragmatically. ²⁷ Understandably, then, the emphasis has also been on the sites of relationship formation, such as the cinema and the dance hall and the links between culture, social practice and courtship.²⁸ The person who stayed away from these places – or who failed to forge romantic bonds there – has not merited as much inquiry.

Another blossoming strand of scholarship has focused on sexual permissiveness and sexual subcultures since the 1960s. In the rich literature on twentieth century homosexuality, we see the potential of work that analyses what it was to be on the outside of traditional structures of coupledness, courtship and marriage, particularly from a spatial perspective. Scholars that do address relationship-formation in this period, albeit cursorily, follow several key strands. One is sociological, using big social theoretical concepts to chart sweeping changes, as demonstrated by the work of Jeffrey Weeks, Ken Plummer, and Anthony Giddens.³⁰ Elsewhere, social-sexual change is grasped through cultural and subcultural sources and the theoretical and discursive interventions of the intelligentsia, including feminist authors, journalists and academics.³¹ In this category, Marcus Collins' treatment of 'modern love' in the twentieth century remains a key text but has also been critiqued for relying on elite formulations.³² And although he includes some analysis of contemporary single stereotypes, Collins is a cultural not a social historian.

There is, then, a case for building on the social history approaches to love taken up by scholars such as Claire Langhamer, Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher but deployed for singleness in the late twentieth century.³³ We need to know more about how ordinary individuals responded to the period's changing social and sexual expectations as they happened. *Singles* helps to do so by opening up a selection of the thoughts and feelings of ordinary, politically heterogeneous adults as they challenged and negotiated with the opposite sex, staking a variety of claims on the proper role of men and women in the world as they saw it around 1980. In doing so, *Singles* also offers striking view of how the new language of gender put in place by 1970s' sexual rights discourse was put to a variety of (often conflictual) uses by people outside of both the activist arena and the commentariat. Further, it tracks the use of this language as the late 1970s and 1980s unfolded, showing how people used new terminologies at the time, without the benefit of reflection.³⁴ As I suggested above, *Singles* was not alone among sociocultural sources at the turn of the 1980s in broaching questions of romantic status, but it was the only nationwide magazine catering specifically to singles from the late 1970s through the 1980s (and 1990s), and served people across all regions, genders and ages. Moreover, unlike with other first-person collections, such as *Mass Observation*, *Singles* writers displayed no conception of posterity: their contributions were emotive and reactive, fuelling a series of ongoing debates that ranged in tone from vituperative to meditative and which could have only taken shape within an ephemeral, flexible publication like this. The magazine was an entirely commercial venture, and rather than dampening its appeal, the diverse mixture of letters, from the extremes of spite to gratitude, fit firmly within its business model.³⁵

Singles' existence testifies to the growing presence of single people, and its contents to the novelty and vexedness of the position they found themselves in. As an object of study, it offers social and cultural historians an analytical opportunity unique among singles' businesses, special interest and lifestyle magazines, and mainstream cultural riffs on the lovelorn. For *Singles* represented commitment to a bold set of competing claims: editorially, to cohere a singles identity and commercially, to offer a way out of singleness; the solidarity of collectivism on one hand and the promise of individual salvation on the other. Thus, the magazine created an extraordinarily pressurised environment for its readers, at once urging them to shore up a shared singles identity, and proffering ways out of the single state. In other words, the boundary line within which the magazine's readers were invited to take shelter was being constantly violated as singles jumped, or tried to jump, to new romantic shores. The problem for those that failed to make the leap was that rather than proffer a cosy resting place, *Singles* – with its pages of personals at the back – often felt like another arena of failure. The result was a highly strung atmosphere in the letters' pages, which – while painful in places – formed the setting for a series of debates characterised by remarkable, sometimes unpleasant, honesty. The letters pages were at their richest in the magazine's editorial heyday of 1977–1983, and their contents during this period consequently form the cornerstone of the forthcoming analysis. First, however, I will sketch the key features of the magazine, in order to foreground the tensions that shaped reader debate and the complex relationship between editorial direction and reception.

Before turning to reader opinion, I want first to first sketch the anatomy of the magazine, by introducing its publisher and editor, John Patterson, and then by giving an overview of its content and structure. These merit attention not only because the magazine is a voluminous, previously unexamined source requiring clear explanation, but because its editorial voice, commercial pitch and political orientation were in constant relationship with readers, both framing their letters and shaping responses to them.

Singles magazine was founded, owned and edited by John Patterson, who was better known as the founder and director of Dateline, Britain's most successful computer dating company, set-up in 1966.³⁶ At the time of writing, repeated (and ongoing) attempts to obtain circulation figures have not yielded any reliable figures, but there is little doubt the magazine had a wide enough 'throw' to merit study.³⁷ It was a national magazine available in 'all good newsagents', according to its subscription slips and notices, and played a central role in several books about the contemporary dating landscape published in the 1980s, while its continuous publication over a relatively long period of time suggests a commercially viable circulation.³⁸

In addition to Dateline and *Singles*, Patterson owned Singles Society, a burgeoning franchise of regional singles groups that made outings and arranged activities. He was also behind sister businesses Singles Weekends and Singles Holidays, while *Singles* (via Dateline Inc) also held events and workshops to teach communications and social skills, such as an all-day 'awareness and communications' advertised in 1978, costing £5.³⁹ Indeed the spirit of enterprise soon to be so endorsed by Thatcher had served Patterson well in the 1960s and 1970s, providing him with the wealth for a wide range of luxuries, from planes to boxes at the races as well as impetuous acts of generosity that cemented his persona as a goodtime John Bull.⁴⁰

Despite owning a mansion and a vineyard thanks to Dateline's proceeds, Patterson successfully portrayed himself as an accessible figurehead for the heterogeneous group his businesses tapped. His interests and pleasures were defined by an appreciation of everyman good times, which consistently shunned the sensitivities of new rights movements: he referred, in his editorials, publishers' letters, and reader-letter responses, to the innocent enjoyment of the sight of pretty women, to the idiocy of student protesters, to the joys of debauched festive parties and their

hangover remedies ('Fernet Branca, a plate of couscous and all this is to be washed down with a bottle of burgundy to replace the alcohol in the bloodstream').⁴¹ If his entrepreneurial success gave him appealing editorial panache, Patterson's romantic status marked him out as fundamentally different from his readers: far from being single, he had an eventful love life. He had met his first wife Sandy Nye – an early customer of *Dateline* and part-time model – in 1967 and had three children with her, divorcing in 1982, after which Nye continued as fashion editor of *Singles*. Patterson then coupled up with his former secretary, Kim Selleck, and had two children with her. While these details were kept from readers, the fact that being single was not a personal problem for Patterson perhaps helps explain the replacement, after just a few years, of the magazine's initial interest in stoking singles solidarity with a growing focus on singletons as a market. Whether Patterson was ever truly motivated by social concern for British singles is doubtful: according to Nye, he was 'a consummate businessman, he did what worked'.⁴² Moreover, Patterson's own personal relationships history – a mixture of traditional expectations of femininity, male family headship and the acrimony of relational breakdown – framed his own impatience with sexual liberation movements and foregrounded the vexedness with which the magazine's readers responded to them.

Besides editor's letters addressing the need for more protection of singles' interests, what was Patterson offering his readers? In part, he framed their issues in a way that brought diverse sensibilities together: poly-political but right-leaning. In addition to calling for singles' solidarity, he established clear enmity against identity politics – particularly those relating to women, sexual and ethnic minorities. Patterson expressed opinions on a surprising range of topics, from Westminster gossip to aggravating *Spare Rib* articles to the joys of wine. But his political and personal stance on the issues of the day were often unpredictable, always leaving room for manoeuvre. When Patterson mentioned formal party leaders the tone was variable and non-committal, seeming to consign all party politics to the realms of human folly. One of his longest-serving writers, Susan Mayfield, built on this sensibility while veering towards libertarianism in a multi-page feature on reproductive policy: 'It seems totally bizarre ... that the government tries to control people's sexuality by making laws at all'⁴³ Indeed Patterson was consistently hostile to the state's regulation of sexual life; he saw brothels as 'not so much a social sin, more a social service' and commented on 'the essentially elitist attitude of the Establishment' towards the 'control' of porn.⁴⁴ On sexual matters he was often more libertarian than his readers, creating points of overlap as well as disagreement with reader opinion. With his frequently rebarbative editorials and sporadic responses to individual letters, the uneven alignment between Patterson's personal views and reader sentiment helped foster the fractious nature of the interchanges in the letters pages.

Although commercially and occasionally editorially linked to Patterson's other businesses, *Singles* was pitched as an independent entity. Its mission was to amuse, inform, involve and collectivise singletons of both genders across Britain. It took the single state seriously. The very first issue saw the first part of a five-part series by psychologist Tony Lake which was billed as an exclusive, in-depth survey on loneliness in Britain.⁴⁵ The magnitude of the suffering was stressed, along with data related to the worst-affected types of single. In the final section, singles were advised on how to combat loneliness, a theme to which the magazine would return in various guises over the years.

More grandly, perhaps, *Singles* set out to catalyse the formation of a new singles movement, pitching itself as a forum for those who had long felt marginalised in an 'aggressively "married" world'.⁴⁶ The 1970s saw a plenitude of women's magazines advocating dating advice and sex tips, a pornographic men's mag market, increasingly sexualised newspapers and a vigorous political and underground press serving countercultural and sexually radical interests that served those outside traditional romantic unions.⁴⁷ Yet *Singles* was the only magazine to take singles seriously not just as a youth market but as a cross-generational group with political potential. The 'growing number of

divorced and separated, one-parent families, the widowed and the independent single' were finally to be heard. 'After all you are a group which represents 20.6% of the adult population or 7 million people! Other magazines have ignored your political welfare, your breadth of interests'48 *Singles* was the champion a group that had so far been languishing in 'second-class citizenship'.49

The strength of *Singles*' mission lay in the very breadth of the target group that also made it so difficult to pinpoint. Readers ranged across ages and regions and across educational and professional lines; judging by the letters, it was also read by roughly equal numbers of men and women.⁵⁰ In an average letters page, only two out of eight letters came from London, and numerous readers focused on the financial hardship of singleness in their letters, including those living in the traditionally higher-income areas. 'I would dispute the fact that single people have more money in their pockets ... [and] the group that is worse off and consequently has the lowest standard of living is single women', wrote one Ms S Stephens of Kensington.⁵¹ Most readers did not state their profession but nonetheless many discussed the problems of singles life when money was short, including the financial and logistical struggle of travelling for dates and the costs of maintaining a single-person household. Single mothers wrote in frequently about the brutal demands on their resources of time and money.⁵²

The relationship between struggling provincial singles and a metropolitan editorial team required cultivation. From the start, *Singles* was set-up to be a dialogue between magazine and reader. 'I wrote that we would act as a watchdog for all Single people and regular readers will know that we have done our best', wrote Patterson in Issue 24. 'But to do the job properly we need to be told by you just what your grievances are and the kind of discrimination you come up against in the course of day-to-day living. In other words, if we are to take positive action we need your help'.⁵³ Over time, however, Patterson's voice faded and readers were increasingly left to thrash out points of disagreement with each other while he focused on the commercial direction of the magazine. But having set out to address a group who felt deprived of a voice, and providing them with a generous letters page, Patterson had successfully created a bottom-up sensibility among the magazine's community. Letter-writers found themselves tossed amid a stormy sea of fellow singleton sentiment. If they were ignored in other areas of society, they could certainly be heard here, although they did not necessarily find friendly support. *Singles* letters pages were rarely a pacific environment, and contributions were increasingly sexually vituperative as the shared singles project vaunted at the start came under continual battery by frustrated readers venting feelings of anger towards the opposite sex.

The magazine's composition in its most ambitious editorial phase, between 1977 and 1983, changed fairly frequently, but the mainstays comprised reader letters of between two and five pages; singles news; opinion; reportage and lifestyle features; a problems page; an in-house psychologist column; other rotating columns and features such as gardening and recipes, and personal ads pages at the back. In its early years, the opinion- and analysis-rich opening section reflected both the intense micro-political energy of the period and the tenor of the 'authoritarian populism' Stuart Hall identified as key to Thatcher's power.⁵⁴ Right-leaning disapproval of progressive causes was the dominant tone, however, particularly in the magazine's early years – and such sentiment was rarely queried by readers. An exemplar of the early political bias of the magazine was 'Ham Fist: who punches straight from the shoulder' a leader section written by short-term editor David Griffiths in 1977–1978.⁵⁵ Ham Fist railed mainly against weak defence policy and feminists, with a section that targeted women seen to represent the worst excesses of women's liberation, called 'Silly of the Month'.⁵⁶ However by 1979, with Ham Fist departed, the introduction of a section entitled Parliamentary Roundup lent weight to the magazine's initial seriousness about defining singles as a distinct social grouping regardless of gender.⁵⁷ The section was designed to keep singles abreast of relevant news from Westminster. From tax credits systems and allowances to widows' pensions and

property regulation, the articles highlighted both ongoing discrimination in favour of the married, such as parsimonious single parent benefit, put up by just 50p a week in 1979,⁵⁸ and singles-friendly measures, like the Conservatives' short-hold tenancy letting scheme promising security of tenure for an agreed period.⁵⁹

The magazine offset its political grumbling with a range of articles targeted to meeting readers' needs. A cherished problems page ranged from sexual issues to more outlying topics such as parental meanness and postal headaches. A recipe column and a gardening column and, for a short period, a consumer column called Domestic Affairs that covered good buys for singles such as microwaves and cheap, small sofas like 'The Burford' for £183.⁶⁰ *Singles* was thus a one-stop-shop for the singleton of 1980, taking their role in what Stephen Brooke has described as a new world defined by contradictory impulses towards greater consumerism and individualism on the one hand, and a sharp desire to maintain or enhance social democratic provisions, such as state-assisted housing, on the other.⁶¹

However, the overall position of *Singles* stemmed from the sense that ordinary people without posh degrees, honest folk who struggled to get by – had been badly used by the 1970s. The impress of nearly a decade of feminist and equal rights struggles was still fresh on a group that had – in the case of many of its members – neither benefited from nor courted the results. The upset caused by a rewriting of social values was also suggested in apparently rising numbers of mental problems in society more widely: magazine *Self and Society*, founded 1973, pitched itself against the insufficient resources of psychotherapeutic provision, with the national health service ill equipped to help the two in five 'in a population struggling to adjust to changing values'.⁶² Women's liberation, welfare policy, strike culture, poorly managed mass immigration, the gay rights movement and a faltering economy were pitched as the evidence of a society going to ruin. Cohabitation appeared to be threatening marriage in the 1980s.⁶³ Yet even on the sources of social decay the readership could not agree. This was in part because from the start, *Singles* had fostered an underlying tension between men and women that pushed cross-sex agreement out of reach, and that – while keeping the idea of a singles identity in view – practically dismantled any unity of vision or purpose among readers. On a superficial level, the potential for sexual antagonism was apparent in the fact that the magazine claimed to serve both sexes, yet drew heavily on a tabloid aesthetic pandering to male sexual gratification. But simply by existing at a particularly tense moment in twentieth century sexual politics and encouraging opinionated, emotive letters from a politically heterogeneous readership deeply invested in how gender roles were playing out, including in the self-descriptions at the back, the magazine was perhaps destined to become a theatre of sexual war. The following section takes a closer look at how the magazine initially treated singleness as a shared identity, before identifying a series of gender-political flashpoints that would prove fatal for the singles solidarity project.

Readers immediately responded to the magazine's call to share grievances, ideas and experiences in order to further the project of a collective singles identity. 'I think all single people should stick together – of all ages – and try to create a better society for ourselves', wrote one in the second issue, while in the third, another said he was

very excited about your magazine. Isn't it remarkable that it has taken all this time to get recognised the fact that being single is more than just not being married, that we are a positive, identifiable group who need to band together so that we don't miss out in a society tailored to married couples?⁶⁴

Such statements contained an irony, expressing a desire for a recognised, empowered minority status even though many readers shared with Patterson a distaste for identity politics, which – in step with the populist media of the early Thatcher tenure – they affixed to corrosive leftist causes.

In some cases, readers showed a remarkable vision of how the magazine might define itself as a political organ. The following manifesto, which was printed as a letter, outlined the causes around which – in the absence of a cohesive vision – Singles readers' might unite:

I have just received my first copy of Singles and it seems to me that the following points are worth mentioning.

1. Articles which could persuade couples to become singles and also establish a viable singles philosophy. The psychological value of the latter would be I think incalculable.
2. Articles or a permanent but open feature which aims at the clarification of what exactly 'Singles' means. Is it a person who is pragmatically against the bitter sweet trauma of the one-man-onewoman set-up, or someone who is temporarily without Mr/Mrs Right.
3. Articles on singles and other countries so that singles in Britain recognise the normality of their existence.
4. Articles critical of lesbianism and homosexuality in so far as they reproduce the couples philosophy.
5. Articles based on the social background to and conditions of the singles phenomenon [and] serious pieces on economic class and sexual philosophy

[six is missing]

7. Polemics with major articles from sister magazines such as Cosmo, Honey, Vogue ...
8. Reviews on major works on human mating practices to be found in S. Firestone, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Gremaine Greer and Engels⁶⁵

This reader built on the idea that – far from being members of society like everyone else – singles required their own overarching ideological agenda: a 'viable singles philosophy' and identity. Rather than being seen as an accidental state, singleness was an axis of identity in itself. Thus, 'number four' subsumed gay rights to singles' rights. And key feminist, socialist texts become useful and interesting because they offered insight into 'human mating practices'.

Hundreds of readers attempted to identify the key issues facing singles at the start of the 1980s, raising dozens of problems and pitching countless ideas for remedies, ranging from limiting abortion to replenish the stock of future single women (perceived to be low)⁶⁶ to introducing video dating (ahead of its time).⁶⁷ But neither the bottom-up structure of the magazine nor its communitarianism produced consensus. Patterson and – to varying degrees his journalists – became more tolerant towards women's rights as the 1970s receded. But the readership continued to be at odds with both itself and the world. A wide range of generational, regional and personal experience guaranteed that a collective singles identity, however, much needed, invariably buckled under attempts to self-define. If it was becoming obvious to marketers that such multifariousness produced conflicting needs and interests, as suggested at the start, then Singles indicated that the group's most divisive characteristic was its variety of sexual standpoints. Nowhere was this more apparent than in persistent attempts to make sense of the sexual-political discourse associated with the Women's Liberation Movement.

Singles readers faced a changing world in which new vocabularies around sex, gender and minority status had profoundly disrupted old assumptions about intimacy.⁶⁸ In line with testing the extent of this disruption and its effect on everyday life, historians of the 1970s and 1980s have put sex, sexual practice and sexuality at the forefront of their analyses. But the ways in which ordinary people

perceived these changes, particularly those who felt aggrieved by them, has garnered less attention.⁶⁹ Among *Singles* readers, new prominence of sexual minorities and discussion of sexual oppression, in particular, irritated readers politically (and to a lesser extent writers) while also providing a useful foil for their personal frustrations. The result was that in its quest to forge a collective identity, *Singles* increasingly became a forum for negative self-definition or sexual antagonism. Although they formed half the readership, women were frequently attacked in the letters pages, in ways that betrayed deep currents of misogyny, particularly in the magazine's earlier years. Joan, a reader from London, offered grisly evidence for her assertion that women in London increasingly faced harassment.

The three of the least offensive remarks addressed to me over the past five days [included]: (a): Give us a feel of those tits, love. (b) Hey pussy – bet you've got a juicy big cunt. (c) to his companion) There's one for us, Don- you take the back, I'll have the front.

Singles' response was insulting and bitterly unprofessional, accusing of her of being

shrill and silly in trying to in trying to defend the indefensible when you must know that such incidents are either pathetic or comic? Above all, you'd do well to remember that every man came out of some woman and if he behaves badly his mother is very likely to bear some responsibility⁷⁰

Singles was also scathing about 'third-world' customs, ironically those relating to treatment of women in particular; immigration, and gay liberation. But of all the disruptive forces to emerge from the 1970s, women's liberation was the key to understanding social dissatisfaction for *Singles* readers. Whether they liked it or not – and a wide range of opinion about different facets of feminism was expressed in the magazine – feminism forced the men and women of the *Singles* community to situate themselves in relation to its new vocabularies and political demands. Most, women as well as men, refused the label 'feminist' by distancing themselves from or simply ridiculing 'women's lib'.⁷¹ Yet while many condemned the feminist movement and its ideas, there was no agreement about the meanings of women's liberation. ⁷² Among the terms used in conjunction or synonymous with feminism were 'rights', 'entitlement' and 'new breeds' of men and women. But the most heavily used was 'equality', and for the historian interested in how new vocabularies of sexual rights played out among non-activist, non-academic and non-media people, this word in particular offers important clues. According to Patterson, 'equality' was the defining idea of an age in which 'monogamous prostitution has been replaced by more fulfilling as well as more trying and dangerous equality', and in which established if unsatisfactory gender roles had given way to a potentially endless seam of dissatisfaction.⁷³ 'Equality' was also used for negotiating a spread of gendered dating topics, from who pays on dates to the idea of chivalry. 'Surely in this age of sexual equality', grumbled one man about the assumption that men will foot the bill on dates, 'Why should men have to do all the work?'⁷⁴ Another widened out this gripe, linking men's financial burden in courtship to a hypocrisy resultant from women's pursuit of equal rights. 'One minute [women] want the same salary for an equivalent job, the same conditions as their male counterparts and yet when it comes to personal relationships, they are out for what they can get from men – in a monetary sense'.⁷⁵ Sometimes 'equality' was simply used as a substitute or shorthand for 'feminism', as when John Patterson wrote that it was possible that women's rights had destroyed the golden age of courtship, which had been dependent on clear gender roles, and that 'perhaps "old fashioned" courting is not possible in these days of equality'.⁷⁶ 'Equality' was not always used scathingly by men, some of whom were alive to the hypocrisy and double standards of male sexism.⁷⁷ Equality concerned *Singles* women, too, who sometimes echoed the wider argument that women's equality had destroyed men's 'sex instinct'.⁷⁸ Yet other female readers saw equality as a goal rather than – as so many readers pitched it – a dubious fait accompli. One female features writer held that 'until women's wages are genuinely equal to men's and all roles within the household are mutual and shared', marriage would remain unfair on women.⁷⁹

The lack of shared definitions of feminism created sharp conflict among contributors to *Singles*. But *Singles*' range of deployments of 'women's liberation' – from different understandings of 'equality' to the widely condemned excesses of 'women's lib' – were linked by one key theme. Whether discussing dating etiquette or working mothers, anxieties about economic standing dominated reader debate. Which sex had, or was expected to have more money represented a highly charged symbolic arena in a shifting landscape of sexual power. That readers were preoccupied with their own affluence in relation to a society apparently filling with consumer goods and aspirations is unsurprising. Historians of the late 1970s have emphasised private consumerist aspirations every bit as strong, or stronger, than a commitment to the collective interest, and – despite the widespread use of the word 'decline' at the time – have described significant rises in standards of living compared to the 1960s that helped stoke envy and aspiration.⁸⁰ The growing purchase of aspirational narratives was also evident in the discursive world of women's magazines towards the end of the 1970s, foregrounding the explosion in the men's lifestyles magazine market of the 1980s.⁸¹ Patterson's own evident wealth, although usually implicit, provided one template against which readers could measure their own lifestyles.⁸²

But singles had good reason to feel left out as many belonged to or felt dangerously close to the groups the sociologist Peter Townsend identified as 'disproportionately' affected by poverty in the 1970s: the unemployed young, single-parent householders and pensioners.⁸³ And readers' preoccupation with individual wealth and opportunities in relation to perceived social norms was soon to be exacerbated by the worst recession since World War Two in 1980–1. If their finances were worrisome when considered in isolation, they took on extra meaning and importance in the field of courtship, where the traditional link between male financial superiority and men's sexual, social and political rights over women had been severed. Thus, looking for intimacy in the politically charged environment of the late 1970s and 1980s, many *Singles* readers logically conceived it as a series of unstable economic and sexual power relations as much as a romantic emotional bond. Historians have stressed the erratic, conflicted story of female emancipation through demographic and survey statistics as well as legislature.⁸⁴ However, in the emotional terms of personal politics, this uncertainty suffused *Singles*' readers' approach to questions about women's status at work and at home. Specifically, in speaking to questions of money, sex and power, feminism provided a set of ideas against which readers across the board could articulate their anger and anxieties. But rather than think about possible sites of affinity in terms of their social and financial status, readers returned again and again to their sexual differences. *Singles* was showing that – despite unifying attempts – singleness, an inherently slippery category, could not be solidified into a functional shared identity at this time. Its inbuilt sexual split between men and women presented too many competing concerns.

Certainly, people who found themselves single around 1980, particularly those who had been in relationships for years until then, confronted significant changes in women's economic status. Acts of Parliament for equal pay rights (1970) and against sexual discrimination (1975) sat alongside figures showing rising numbers of women in the workforce – including mothers – against falling rates of men.⁸⁵ Women's average levels of education converged with men's for the first time in the decade, and their overall wage earnings rose relative to men's.⁸⁶ A female prime minister in 1979 seemed the capstone in women's gains. The reality was less clearly suggestive of a female breakthrough, with rising numbers of women in lower-status, clerical jobs than men and earning less than men for the same work.⁸⁷ Yet with frequent newspaper reports of triumphant female 'firsts', the perception of female gains was easily exaggerated,⁸⁸ and among *Singles* readers – despite their own experiences frequently indicating a different reality – these gains were felt to be omniscient.

The question of how women should use their increasing potential for economic independence was a matter of dispute among *Singles* readers in relation to two main areas: financial outlay in courtship and motherhood. In relation to the first, the question of 'equal' bill-sharing on dates commanded particular feeling.⁸⁹ Seen as emblematic of the illegible new romantic terrain, it inspired so many heated letters that Patterson commissioned a standalone piece: 'Going Dutch – or not? Time to take a new look at some old rules'.⁹⁰ Explained Patterson: 'These misunderstandings about who pays are becoming more frequent as more women become independent and earn more money. Men feel resentful that they are obliged to take a girl out, claiming women are taking advantage of them, while women often feel old conventions still apply when out on "a date"'.

The flood of letters in response to the Going Dutch article signalled the levels of confusion over the status of that traditional embodiment of masculine clout, the financial upper hand.⁹¹ Indeed, the uncertain status of male economic power and the changing status of women and work shaped feelings about practices that went beyond dating and into the heart of family life. Importantly, many readers believed that a woman's place was in the home once she became a mother, and were at pains to rebut and mock feminist key words, especially 'rights', on these points. The perceived new breed of mothers who either worked out of choice rather than necessity, or had children when they couldn't afford to look after them without working, were deemed irresponsible or selfish.⁹² Women in particular often linked these traits to the effects of Women's Liberation. One reader commented on the rise of 'selfish' single mothers, which she attributed with ironic scorn to the 'plight and "rights" of single parents ... Have these girls/women not been informed that it is no longer necessary to become pregnant?'⁹³ Others located the decay caused by rights discourse in women's sense of entitlement to work and have children. Here they favoured the idea of the 'real' woman and 'real' man, a criticism of the relativising, unrealistic and troublemaking predilections of feminists. In response to Ms P. A. complaining that the Inland Revenue failed to recognise her as unmarried (when she proudly cohabited and worked full time), another wanted to know: 'does she want jam on [the fact that she is self-sufficient]? ... Has Ms P. A. stopped to think what her man would do if she was out of work? If he was any kind of man at all he would support her, and her child, as any husband, or father would'.⁹⁴ A Ms Harker was disgusted by 'the newfound greed of working wives and those wives who wish to work but for the fact that small children keep them at home, as so they should'.⁹⁵ Though far from uncontested, Ms Harker's view was – at least in 1979 – seen as representative of the *Singles* sensibility: in response to this letter, Patterson wrote: 'We are sure many of our readers will agree with your sentiments Ms Harker'. Other women agreed with a popular male line that women's careers did not just damage families, they hurt romantic relationships: and once again, feminism was to blame. Susan Mayfield, features writer, wrote of the perils of the career woman with a 1982 story called 'Why I want to remarry' in which she told how: 'Sure, I had a man in my life, but I was determined he wouldn't take advantage of me My job, I informed him, always had to come first'. She wound up alone and miserable.⁹⁶ Such arguments were not always let to lie, and female readers with feminist leanings occasionally responded to them. A notable example came from one SG Bennett of Birmingham, who wrote on two occasions. She took particular issue with Ms Harker's 'doctrinaire conviction that mothers have to be at home to be good mothers – which doctrine is simply not accepted by many women, men and well-adjusted offspring of working mothers'.⁹⁷ Rare were those among this readership who sided with the 'many' people who supported working mothers, and just who the 'many' Ms Bennett had in mind was, unfortunately, not elaborated on.

Men less frequently criticised the new gender configurations around paid work; one reader, engaging with contemporary narratives of affluence, simply assumed that women, whether mothers or not, only worked under duress: 'the present society does force most women to get a job ... alas the wife must get a job if she wants all the so-called trimmings of 1978'.⁹⁸ Just as women readers sometimes attacked each other, it wasn't uncommon for two men to lock horns over women's

economic status. In response to a fellow male's letter titled 'What price equality?' complaining about female gold-diggers in the personals, this man excoriated such 'equal opportunity nonsense' noting:

... it is true that laws have been passed to give women equality. Laws however do not create a climate of equal opportunity. Does [that reader] read statistics of women's earnings? Has he considered that even today many women forego career opportunities, when they marry and have children?⁹⁹

Patterson himself was inconsistent on women's equal rights, but on several occasions he made clear that he saw women's pursuit of education and careers – 'equality' – as a denial of their natural calling. In a *Singular Topics* piece entitled, 'Beat boredom; have a baby', Patterson addressed 1977 statistics showing that the most common age group for unmarried women to have babies was between 30 and 34. With his trademark tone of breezy sexual common sense, he observed:

Women, I suspect, get broody about their biological destiny. Equality demands that they pass their 'A' (for 'Achievement') levels; go to university and build a successful career. All this takes time ... so the career woman suddenly finds herself running into her thirties ... with an established but uneventful future ahead of her ... What to do about it?? Why, turn to the internal adventure of having baby, that's what.¹⁰⁰

Yet from the tangle of *Singles* readers' experience inevitably emerged stories that contradicted the idea that women merely had to choose between a lucrative career and a well-provided motherhood, and that spoke to the harsh realities of inequality that traversed income, class and gender. For one single mother writing a confessional feature, the focus of discontent was poverty and the sheer difficulty of raising children singlehandedly. 'One-parenthood: or there's only scraps to eat but no scrapping at the table,' she noted, along with gratitude that 'at least the poor house has been abolished'.¹⁰¹ Another poor single mother wrote to the Problems page asking, in desperation, if there was anywhere she could borrow money urgently so that she could buy her daughter school necessities.¹⁰² And women who found themselves single when older could feel used and discarded by society, with fewer prospects than the young or male. 'Perhaps being on your own isn't quite so bad for them,' wrote a 47-year old,

but when you are just an 'ordinary' type, namely the little piggy that stayed at home and had three children, the one that can cook, look after home, a dog and a cat and 23 tropical fishes ... when that person looks around and tries to emerge from the chrysalis, it ain't so easy! Can't get a decent job; too old for GCEs. Too old- I ask you, at 47, except if I want to be someone else's cleaner!¹⁰³

Older divorced or widowed women like this tended to be more gung-ho in offering their experience to the readership, and age discrimination received attention in the letters pages. But the struggles faced by poorer single mothers remained on the periphery of the broader readership's arguments about equality. Because these remained rooted in assumptions about competing sexual agendas between men and women, there was little consideration of how other inequalities – of income, class, education and race – might weight the balance against women in different ways.

Certainly, men were less interested in any shared, reader-wide struggle against poverty than in the material expectations of the new, economically liberated female. 'It has been three months now since I started buying *Singles* hoping to find someone to start again with, and what do I get?' wrote one. 'I quote: "Are you romantic," "Tall handsome male" ... I would like to point out to all you ladies with money and a car and a house in the country that you would not know what to do with a real man'. This man felt that with their new wealth and success, post-1970s woman had lost sight of men's romantic value, and went on to define what he meant by 'real man' in these terms:

By real man, I mean one who could match you at anything inside the house or out, from doing the washing to matching you in the kitchen, from swimming to riding, boats (motor and sail) and after all this keeping you happy in bed ... Money can buy you something in trousers that looks nice but what do you want a man or a pet?¹⁰⁴

Although this reader was criticising the expectations of the liberated c. 1980 woman, he was also repurposing the idea of gender equality in which the male's very virility was part and parcel of his skill and willingness to cook and clean. Some women saw through such 'real man' posturing: one divorcee who responded to the former man's letter in 1979 described how she was redoing her cottage single-handedly, working two jobs, and still had time for dancing and travel. 'He claims to be a "real man" and more or less admits he is neither romantic, tall nor financially sound', she wrote. 'I am willing to teach Mr Keeble how to make himself attractive to the opposite sex, but first of all, he must get rid of that chip on his shoulder!!'¹⁰⁵

Exploring assumptions about the individualism and growing materialism of Britons in the 1970s, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has shown how the Conservative party strongly believed in the latent health of British family values and put this belief at the centre of economic policy.¹⁰⁶ The voices in *Singles* magazine seem to partially support Thatcher's intuition about an enduring affinity to communitarian moral codes; the flipside of their preoccupation with other people's economic greed was a very real concern to cling to an older, less materialistic morality. In Patterson's estimation, late 1970s discourses of affluence and social mobility had affected everyone for the worse: 'most people ... seem to be more interested in materialism, that is to say 'The Fat Buck'.¹⁰⁷ For many readers, however, the virus of greed and aspiration was specific to women in at least two ways. In one view, women's material expectations had been raised by their own advanced economic prospects. The second held that women had remained passive, but had absorbed the ever-more acquisitive turn of society and had started substituting greed for love. For the reader and peruser of *Singles* personals Noel A. Shaw, avarice was unequivocally the modern woman's problem, one that was all too often taken out on romantically-inclined men.¹⁰⁸ Shaw's letter is worth quoting at some length to reveal the layers of anger that emanated from his experience in the *Singles* lonely hearts and particularly the centrality of economic insecurity within it.

It will be found that roughly one in three women include in their requirements, one or more of the three worlds, 'business', 'professional', and 'executive'. Using your red felt-tip, mark these 'grabber', 'climber', 'leech', whatever takes your fancy. Also, look for those including such phrases as 'financially sound', 'wealthy', 'reasonably rich', 'successful', 'solvent', 'generous' and the like. Mark these 'G/Digger' or with just a plain '£' or '\$' sign. actually there may be some justification here, if there is any truth in the rumour that some women can only achieve orgasms in a bedroom with a £20 note pasted to the ceiling.¹⁰⁹

Many *Singles* women were, understandably, offended by such accusations, and wrote to explain why they advertised for a financially successful partner. Survival or simply exhaustion rather than greed was the issue at stake: responding to Noel Shaw, one woman explained that 'the "successful" "solvent" etc. part of the vocabulary usually tells a story if you look a little further. It usually means they are sick to death of trying to live on a pittance and having to go out to work and make ends meet'.¹¹⁰ The argument was traditional but fair: mothers shouldn't have to be full time housewives and do paid work under duress. The frustration with that situation burst out of another reader in response to Noel Shaw: 'If ever I have the fortune or misfortune to meet another man that I'll contemplate marrying HE will have to have the money, HE will have to be the sole bread winner, HE will have to spoil and pamper me, etc. ...'¹¹¹

But for the reader Joan, whose long letter encompassed many topics, men's money had misogynist, transactional overtones, whereby sex was expected in return for dinner.

I was once told by a bloke who saw me home, that I had 'no right' to deny his access to my bed because I had let him buy me drinks. I pointed out that not only had he adopted an attitude of hurt male pride when I offered to buy a round, but that if he wanted to buy a woman I understood the going price in London was rather higher than two martinis, and I wasn't for sale.¹¹²

Joan further emphasised that women's supposed economic independence was not accepted by men, who preyed on women when they tried to pay their way alone. A previous letter writer, Ed, had complained about the dearth of willing single women in night clubs. Joan explained the truth about this state of affairs: namely, that 'a female seen alone at a place of public entertainment is still regarded (in this age of supposed equality) as an "easy lay" by a large number of his sex'.

Equality had not just confused dating: having created a new breed of financially rapacious women it had also called the whole institution of marriage into question. The traditional exchange of wifely care for male protection and the free exercise of his sexual instinct no longer seemed intact. In fact, for some men in the *Singles* community, marriage had been recast as something for feminist dupes. Patterson mused on the rise of women's rights alongside soaring divorce rates. 'I wonder whether the perils of "marriage", whatever form it takes, don't now outweigh the advantages. Time was, when a man had to marry the girl, tie a knot in it, or pay for his pleasures. But that time has past and with it, it seems, the traditional marriage contract' What this meant for singles was unclear. But there certainly was a silver lining for men in marital decline: 'all men have to lose is their chains' as they headed to the divorce court' (1978).¹¹³ Divorce was understandable as well as a relief: for 'Who'd want to marry, or even live with, the new breed of female [financial] predators?'¹¹⁴ However, bold, the implications of this antagonism were complex. For male singles, there was gloating in remaining single and thus free of the mercenary 'new breed of female predators'. Was this then an opening for solidarity among single men unified by the desire to be shot of 1980s woman? Were they resigned to responding to changes in the gender order by remaining single? Their continued adherence to the expanding lonely hearts section at the back of *Singles* suggests not. Yet there was little doubt that for *Singles* readers of both sexes, and particularly for the men, women's changed role was fatally undermining courtship. The convergence of 'women's lib' and modern materialism had proved cataclysmic for older romantic certainties, fracturing any possibility for agreement between and among male and female singles.¹¹⁵

The 1970s saw dramatic changes in the economic, industrial and social fabric of Britain. It was also, perhaps even primarily, a decade of shocks for heterosexual intimate life as new vocabularies of gender unleashed by the feminist movement reverberated throughout the households and bedrooms of Britain. Those facing a romantic open field and hoping to find love felt and responded to these ideas with particular intensity, as the writing, particularly the letters, in *Singles* shows. More widely, the magazine works as an eloquent case study for how the explosion in and circulation of feminist ideas provoked a crisis in gendered selfhood for a cross-section of British adults, young and old. Thus *Singles* not only offers historians a record of value in its plenitude of views but it does so, perhaps even more importantly, in allowing us to track the ways in which discourses normally studied within the context of activist networks played out in the realm of everyday social encounters. The magazine offers a window onto how the lexicon of sexual rights and entitlement circulated beyond the activist core and, stimulating confusion and disagreement among ordinary people, shaped the arguments of those opposed as well as in favour of it. Alison Light's conviction that 'the conservative as well as the radical imagination' is vital to an understanding of twentieth century Britain seems particularly relevant here, prompting us to take from a source like *Singles* a wider, more nuanced appreciation the impact of the sex-political changes of the 1970s.¹¹⁶

In addition to the unintentional service to historians of shedding new light on a key moment in the late-twentieth century history of sexual politics, *Singles* articulated its own idea of historical purpose, with a self-confidence that chimed with the grassroots, populist nature of political

sensibility in the 1970s and 1980s. It sought to make an intervention not just in terms of the existing press offering, but in relation to British society more widely, a Britain perceived to privilege couples legally, financially, socially and culturally. Yet ultimately the *Singles* attempt to create a unified identity, and from there a movement, failed. The magazine could not escape the gender-political era in which it came into being, and the debates it fostered bear witness to the level of irreconcilability among its readership towards the world and to each other. Despite concerted attempts by readers and writers at the start to establish a cross-gender group with shared political goals, and sporadic attempts thereafter to do so, the fledgling singles movement was ultimately most effective in identifying common enemies rather than in fostering common values. Though as both the letters pages and editorial comment show over the magazine's first six years, there was little agreement even over those enemies. To the contrary, *Singles* provides a vivid picture of just how divided readers were over the legacies of the 1970s.

Always an entrepreneur, Patterson seemed to move in step with the spirit of Thatcherism, increasingly moving towards an a-political, commercial vision of singleness as the 1980s progressed. *Singles* as it looked in the middle and late 1980s put Patterson's early evangelism about creating a watchdog for the solo in perspective. The charitable view might see it as a well-intentioned but short-lived experiment; more cynically Patterson's stated mission for the singles community could be seen as mere commercial gimmickry to lure the lonely into his dating empire. Certainly, the later *Singles* was more in keeping with its sister businesses, Dateline and Singles Holidays, than with a continued commitment to a communal singles lobby. *Singles* readers did not complain about the change in format, however. On the contrary, Patterson claimed to be responding to reader demand.¹¹⁷ Indeed by the mid-1980s, changes in the layout and scope of the magazine had signalled a departure from the reader-led interest in a singles insurgency present at the start. Increasingly construed as an expanding customer-base with specific demands – namely, more dating options – the *Singles* readership also lost its political bite. By 1985, the rhetoric of a singles movement had faded and the discourse of a united front was replaced by a series of atomised lonely hearts profiles and the lone voices of some of the individuals behind them who continued to write in to the letters page. The move to more commercial emphasis was mirrored in the shift in emphasis apparent in other publications, particularly women's magazines, from the meanings of feminism towards its uses and applications in a career-oriented world.¹¹⁸

The magazine's shift from the collectivising, unifying impulse of the 1970s to the individualised, commercialised vision of singleness in the 1980s accompanied a key development in modern British social and intimate life that arguably reaches right up to the present – the replacement of a fixed model of relationships with a far more fluid, or unstable one. The importance of this shift has been particularly endorsed by sociologists led by Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman, but is also reflected in historical data.¹¹⁹ If statistics about marriage and cohabitation suggested that relational fixity faded over the 1970s and into the eighties and nineties, a new literature from the mid-1980s onwards tried to make sense of the expanded dating options facing singles. John Cockburn attempted an anthropological survey in *Lonely Hearts: Love Among the Small Ads* (1988); Linda Sonntag wrote a roadmap for the newly marketised dating landscape in *Finding The Love of Your Life Using Dating Agencies and Ads* (1988); Collette Sinclair provided an autobiographical, emotional account of using small ads and upscale agencies in the 1980s in *Manhunt* (1989), and Paul Reizin comically recounted his experiences using Guardian Soulmates' print and phone service in *Date Expectations: One Man's Journey Through the Lonely Hearts* in the late 1990s.¹²⁰

The energetic progressive movements of the 1970s helped catalyse a host of positive changes in gender relations, sexual practice and the status of women in that period and afterwards. However, this article has used *Singles* magazine to argue that we must be equally aware of the confusion and anger that attended new possibilities for emotional, sexual and romantic life in the period. To do so

we need to look at the play of ideas among ordinary, often conservative adults rather than activists, not just in the 1970s but in the 1980s as well. Insofar as we use print sources to do so, we also need to pay closer attention to readerships of mixed age and sex that have been relatively excluded from the rich literature on magazines. In this regard, the variety of generational perspectives in *Singles* could be fruitfully set against the treatment of life stage more broadly in the magazine landscape in further work looking at the intersections of age, singleness and loneliness.

Attention to the feelings of singles, however disparate the group, are central to understanding the process by which people recognised that older assumptions about sex, gender and the traditional family had been punctured for good. While the prospect of an end to the traditional sexual order was confusing and enraging to some, both Patterson and his readers knew it was unavoidable. Safe in that knowledge, they tried to formulate their place in the post-1970s gender puzzle and used the mixed-sex forum of the magazine to do so. As competing agendas between men and women emerged, the intensity of dispute eclipsed any solidarity across the readership. In directing their perception of changes in the outside world inwards, towards the very men and women they were facing as possible partners, *Singles* readers pitted their disagreement over the new world order against the chance of finally escaping their single state. While on the one hand providing them with a path out of loneliness, on the other the magazine offered scant comfort about the chances of romantic fulfilment. It had created a readership that was all too often its own worst enemy. However, their war didn't last forever: after six years of heavy artillery, the commodified aspect of love increasingly took precedence over the political one, and created an uneasy peace.

Notes

1. *Singles*, 4 (September 1977), p. 21.
2. In 1970, 17 per cent of households were single-person. By 1985 it was 24 per cent, and by 1998 it was 31 per cent. This was by far the fastest-rising type of household in the period. See 'Households, families and people (General Lifestyle Survey Overview – a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey),' Office For National Statistics, 7 March 2013, p. 2, ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_302210.pdf, last accessed 2 April 2016.
3. Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914–1960* (Manchester, 2007).
4. Mintel Special Report, 'Single Person Households 1992: Single Living, Diverse Lifestyles', 2. The report pulled together data from the 1980s.
5. Studies of mid-century loneliness in relation to the elderly have been particularly fruitful; Peter Townsend, *The Family Life of Old People: An Inquiry Into East London* (London, 1957); Jeremy Tunstall, *Old and Alone: A Sociological Study of Old People* (London, 1966); for an overview: Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'Love in Later Life: Old Age, Marriage and Social Research in Mid- Twentieth Century Britain', in Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones (eds), *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918–1970* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 144–60, and for a rich exploration, Charlotte Greenhalgh, 'An Age of Emotion: Expertise and Subjectivity in Old Age in Britain, 1937–1970', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2012.
6. Estimates of numbers of active agencies varied constantly, but for a sense of the growing industry, see 'Move to help victims of the "lonely hearts" cheats', *The Guardian*, 28 November 1980, p. 3 and 'Boom Time in Lonely Hearts Trade' *The Daily Mail*, 27 November 1985. The number of agencies advertising nationally in 1981 was over 50; there were hundreds more local outfits; 'Alone Again, Naturally,' *The Guardian*, 14 October 1981, p. 10.
7. Anna Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Marketing and Readerships* (London, 2003), pp. 60–64.
8. The media responded widely to the release of this report, debating the status of single living in Britain, e.g. 'Solitary pains and pleasures: Janet Watts examines whether her experiences

match up to those portrayed in last week's report on people who live alone', *The Observer*, 20 September 1992, p. 48.

9. Mintel Special Report, 'Single Person Households 1992: Single Living, Diverse Lifestyles', 11; for thorough discussion of divorce statistics in Britain during this period, see Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 29–43.
10. See Max Caulfield, *Mary Whitehouse* (London, 1975). For the wider relationship between conservatives and social changes in Britain, see Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880–1990* (Cardiff, 1996); for the conservative reaction to the Greenham Common women's occupation, Chris Moores, 'Opposition to the Greenham Women's Peace Camps in 1980s Britain: RAGE Against the "Obscene"', *History Workshop Journal*, 70 (2014).
11. Nowhere were singles forced to describe who they were and what they wanted more explicitly than in the lonely hearts ads which, among other places, filled the back section of *Singles*.
12. Zoe Strimpel, 'Heterosexual Love in the British Women's Liberation Movement: Reflections from the Sisterhood and After Archive', *Women's History Review* 26 (2016). Examples of activistfocussed intellectual histories of the period are Lawrence Black, Hugh Pemberton and Pat Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester, 2013); Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: A Memoir of the Sixties* (London, 2000) Lynne Segal, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), Daisy Payling, "'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire": Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield', *Twentieth Century British History*, (2014).
13. Notable explorations of 'New Right' activism include Chris Moores's 'Opposition', which shows how a group of local campaigners opposing Greenham Common occupation camps attempted to have the women removed, although the anti-Greenham group, RAGE, was and a relatively narrow selection of press cuttings. Beatrix Campbell's study of 'Tory women' attempts to explain why women voted for Thatcher, but is equally focussed on explaining where the left went wrong and does not emphasise the ways in which anger and frustration – of both sexes – were expressed in relation to new sexual-political climate. *The Iron Ladies: Why Do Women Vote Tory?* (London, 1987). Roger King and Neill Nugent (eds), offered a sustained analysis of conservative feeling in the 1970s, but once more it focuses on organised 'new right' groups, and is curtailed by its date of writing. *Respectable Rebels: Middle Class Campaigns in Britain in the 1970s* (London, 1979).
14. Angela Phillips, in Bob Franklin (ed.), *Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analysing Print Journalism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), p. 103; Proops, cited in Adrian Bingham (2012), 'Newspaper Problem Pages and Sexual Culture Since 1918', 18:1, *Media History*, pp. 51–63: 53 and 54.
15. See Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London, 1987), pp. 82–123.
16. Male readers formed a sizeable fraction of women's magazine readers, so it could be argued that although they were 'women's magazines', the debates and messages within reached a wider audience. See Winship, p. 5.
17. Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (Basingstoke, 1991); Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines*.
18. McRobbie, *Feminism*, p. 67.
19. Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-style in Modern America* (Oxford, 2001); Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption* (London, 1996).
20. See discussion in Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell, and Chris Reid, 'Fashioning Masculinity: Men Only, Consumption Marketing in the 1930s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10:4, pp. 457–76.

21. Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p. 8; Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001), p. 9.
22. Hera Cook, 'Nova' in Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones (eds), *Love and Romance in Britain*, 227. Examples of couple-centric historiography include Claire Langhamer, *The English In Love: The Intimate Story of A Sexual Revolution* (Oxford, 2013); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Britain, 1900–2000* (London, 2003); Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800–1975* (Oxford, 2004). A notable exception is the work of Harry Cocks on the matrimonial press; in particular, *Classified: The Secret History of the Personal Column* (London, 2009) examines the strategies of often luckless singletons throughout the 20th century. Elsewhere, the historiographical bias towards the coupled or coupling extends beyond Britain, including Luisa Passerini, *Women and Men in Love: European Identities in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2012); Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge, 2011); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005), and John Griffith Urang, *Legal Tender: Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, 2010).
23. Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*.
24. Anthea Duquenin, 'Who doesn't marry and why?' *Oral History*, 12 (1984), p. 40.
25. Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (London, 2007); Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996).
26. Margaret Adams, *Single Blessedness: Observations on the Single Status in Married Society* (London, 1977); Kate Herbert-Hunting, *Universal Aunts* (London, 1986); Dana Barron, 'Sex and Single Girls in the Twentieth Century City', *Journal of Urban History*, 25 (1999), pp. 838–47; Laura Doan (ed.), *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters – Unmarried Women in the 20th Century Novel* (Urbana, 1991); Alison Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted or Bearer of the New World: The Spinster in Interwar Feminist Discourse', *Women's History Review*, 1 (1992), pp. 413–33; Elizabeth Abbott, *A History of Celibacy* (Cambridge, 2001).
27. Cook, 'Nova', p. 227.
28. James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social And Cultural History of Dancing and Dance Halls in Britain, 1918–60* (Oxford, 2015); Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic, Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London, 2002); see also discussion about the importance of cinema for mid-century courtship in Langhamer, *The English In Love*, p. 113.
29. Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–57* (Chicago, 2005); Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (London, 2014); Geoffrey Chauncey, 'Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets' in J. Saunders (ed.), *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York, 1996), pp. 224–67.
30. Weeks, esp. *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London, 2007); Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, 1992); Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change, and Social Worlds* (London, 1994); Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2007).
31. Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How The Personal Got Political* (Manchester, 2007); Collins, *Modern Love*.
32. C. Langhamer, 'Love and Courtship in Mid-Twentieth Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 5 (2007), pp. 174–75.
33. Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918– 1963* (Cambridge, 2010).

34. For first-person testimony dealing with these themes in this period but in recollection, the Mass Observation Project is probably peerless, in particular the Women and Men (1991) Courting and Dating (2001) and Sex (2005) directives.
35. Personal interview with Patterson's business partner, ex-wife and widow Sandy Nye, 18 February, Rochester, England. See also Richardson, 'Readers' Letters'.
36. *Singles* changed name several times between 1977 and 2004, a sequence that is set out in detail later. For simplicity's sake, however, I will refer to the magazine as *Singles* throughout.
37. The difficulty in obtaining circulation figures comes from the fact that *Singles*, belonging to Dateline Inc, changed hands numerous times after the mid-1990s. Peter Mandler's famous metric for cultural sources (2004), 'throw', is in 'The Problem With Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (1), pp. 94–117.
38. For instance, John Cockburn *Lonely Hearts: Love Among the Small Ads* (London, 1988) and Collette Sinclair *Manhunt* (London, 1989).
39. *Singles*, 14 (July 1978), p. 17.
40. One contributor to a 2006 online thread seeking to establish Patterson's residency in Hambledon, Hants, wrote: 'I was a plasterer working on [John's] wine bar next door to his offices, he was a great bloke helped me sort out my flat I was buying, John and Kim even took met with them one night for a Thai meal. Eventhough [sic] I was still in my working cloths [sic], The Answer Bank, <http://www.theanswerbank.co.uk/Quizzes-and-Puzzles/Question290553.html>, last accessed 3 March 2016. His ex-wife, business partner and widow, Sandy Nye, confirmed that both she and Patterson 'loved' Thatcher for the economic climate she introduced: 'she was for the young businesses, people willing to put their back into it', private interview, 18 Feb 2016, in Rochester, England.
41. *Singles*, 31(Dec 1979), p. 19.
42. Interview, 18 February.
43. *Singles*, 20 (September 1978), p. 18.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 37 (June 1980), 1, and *ibid.*, p. 40 (Sep 1980), 5.
45. 'Loneliness: A Singles Research', *Singles*, 1 (May 1977), pp. 15–16. Lake used this investigation as the basis of a book, *Loneliness: Why It Happens and How To Overcome It* (London, 1980). Another interest was infidelity: Lake, *Affairs: The Anatomy of Extra-Marital Relationships* (London, 1979).
46. Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage*, 19. *Singles* launched three years after Margaret Adams tried to formulate a re-conceptualisation of singleness as a full social status in its own right through an Anglo-American study of the unmarried. Adams, *Single Blessedness* (New York, 1978).
47. Men's pornographic magazines launched in the 1960s included *Penthouse*, *Mayfair* and *King*. For a discussion of the wider market, see Marcus Collins, 'The Pornography of Permissiveness: Men's Sexuality and Women's Emancipation in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999), pp. 99–120. For the rise of a lifestyle-focussed men's mags Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption* (London, 1996).
48. 'This magazine, being the first national one for *Singles*, will I hope become an active and powerful innovatory force in reflecting and advocating changes in society', wrote a reader in *Singles* 4, (September 1977), p. 7. Patterson himself saw its potential to cater for a large captive market, noting in the publisher's letter of Issue 10 that 'Singles is unique in publishing today – a special interest magazine with a potential 7 ½ million readers' (March 1977), p. 3.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 2 (June 1977), 3.
50. Information on total readership numbers appears to be unavailable.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 2 (June 1977), 18.

52. E.g. 'I have been divorced for two years now and believe me, what with money problems, baby-sitting problems, I feel very single, when I sit alone night after night,' wrote Caroline Ellis of Hampstead, *Singles*, 1 (May 1977), p. 19.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 24 (May 1979), 6.
54. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979, p. 15.
55. Like its titles, the *Singles* editorship had a fragmented history, pointing to the ad hoc nature of the publication as well as to the relative flexibility and informality of the period's publishing climate. Out of a total of five editors in its first five years, Patterson claimed the most issues and would remain at the helm until his death.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 8 (Jan 1977), 11.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 26, (July 1979).
58. *Ibid.*, p. 28 (Sep 1979), 4.
59. E.g. *Ibid.*, p. 26 (July 1979), 4.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 26 (July 1979), 37. Beyond this section, the magazine was attentive to the burgeoning consumer options for singles; other items discussed included a go-it alone chessboard boasting a voice feature with an 'extensive vocabulary' for £249 (*Singles*, 30, 4) and a newly cheap design for 'one room living' in a compact bachelor pad or a student bedsit. These were on show at an exhibition at the Design Centre, Haymarket. *Singles*, 40 (Oct 1980), p. 7.
61. Stephen Brooke, 'Living in "New Times": Historicizing 1980s Britain', *History Compass*, 12 (2014), pp. 20–23.
62. Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 273. The agony aunt Marje Proops also claimed to be filling a therapeutic void left by rapid social change, *Dear Marje* (London, 1977), p. 7.
63. Discussion of rising numbers of cohabitation in Stephen Brooke, 'Living in "New Times", for whom 'unmarried cohabitation is really the shape of the new romances of the 1980s', 'Living in "New Times": Historicizing 1980s Britain', *History Compass*, 12 (2014), p. 23.
64. *Singles*, 3 (August 1977), p. 23.
65. *Ibid.*, 12 (May 1978), p. 5.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 30 (November 1979), 7.
67. *Singles*, 59 (April 1982), p. 7.
68. Weeks, *The World We Have Won*; Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke, 2000); Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London, 1982); Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: A Memoir of the 1960s* (London, 2000).
69. Ben Mechen, 'Everyday Sex in Seventies Britain', PhD thesis, UCL, 2016; Cas Wouters, 'Balancing Sex and Love since the 1960s Sexual Revolution', *Theory Culture and Society*, 15 (1998), pp. 187–214.
70. *Singles*, 6 (Nov 1977), 8.
71. e.g. '... never mind about women's libs and all that ... [But] where have [the men] gone?' The men this reader was looking for were 'kind and courteous ... in whose presence one comes alive, feels safe, soothed and feminine' – rather than those willing to do the dishes and childcare (*Ibid.*, p. 6, November 1977, 6) See also 'I'm single but don't call me frustrated' in opposition to the 'sour grapes attitude ... that some women's libbers seem to convey' (*Ibid.*, p. 6, November 1977, 25).
72. For the ways in which confusion over new gender vocabulary played out in politics, see Joni Loveduski, *Sex, Gender and British Politics*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 49:1 (1996), pp. 1–16: 2.
73. *Singles*, 43 (December 1980), 9.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 30 (November 1979), 7.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 43 (December 1980), 3.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 42 (November 1980), 4.

77. e.g. 'There exists a feminist movement and recent laws towards general equality but few subscribe to, and many circumnavigate, them,' noted one. 'If men were more egalitarian towards wealth and status among themselves only then could they reasonably complain about women.' Ibid., p. 45 (February 1981), 5.
78. See, for instance, Gwen Parrish of the National Union of Townswomen Guilds, quoted in an article on street violence: 'Has equality in some way lowered a mental drawbridge through which man and his inbred animal instincts for sex feels free to walk, substituting mental rape and pillage for the real thing?' Ibid., p. 41 (October 1980), 18.
79. Ibid., p. 13 (June 1978), 27.
80. Robert Taylor, *The Fifth Estate: Britain's Unions in the Seventies* (London, 1978), p. 122; Taylor, 'The Rise and Fall of the Social Contract' in Seldon and Hickson (eds), *New Labour, Old New Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974–79* (London, 2004), p. 101. Dominic Sandbrook, *Season in the Sun: The Battle For Britain, 1974–1979* (London, 2012), p. 13. The Financial Times economic correspondent Samuel Brittan identified a new 1970s problem in the form of 'excessive expectations' of material wealth. Samuel Brittan, 'The Economic Contradictions of Democracy', in Anthony King (ed.), *Why is Britain Becoming Harder to Govern?* (London, 1976), pp. 96–128. Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom Poverty: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (1979), digital edition, 902.
81. Thorough discussion of commercial dynamics of aspirationalism in commercial magazines in Gough, *Understanding Women's Magazines*, pp. 98–118.
82. For instance, Patterson breezily discussed his box at the Royal Albert Hall, *Singles* 39 (August 1980) 12.
83. See Keith Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State (The End of the Postwar Era: Britain Since 1974)* (Basingstoke, 1991), chapter 7.
84. For limitations of the widely-used National Attitudes to Sex survey (1994) see Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1994–1994: From Mass-Observation's 'Little Kinsey' to the national survey and the Hite reports* (London, 1995); empirical approaches include Avner Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence: Self Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain Since 1950* (Oxford, 2006); Jane Lewis, *The end of marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations* (Cheltenham, 2001); Dolly Smith Wilson, 'Gender, Change and Continuity' in Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (eds), *Companion to Contemporary Britain, 1939–2000* (Oxford, 2005).
85. Institute for Employment Studies, 'Women in the Labour Market' (Sep 1995), report 294, online, www.employment-studies.co.uk/report-summary-women-labour-market-two-decadeschange-and-continuity, accessed 8 March 2016.
86. Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence*, p. 148.
87. Ann Phillips and Barbara Taylor, 'Sex and skill: notes towards a feminist economics', *Feminist Review*, 6 (1980), pp. 79–88; Cynthia Cockburn, *The Machinery of Dominance* (London, 1985); Campbell and Coote, *Sweet Freedom*, particularly pp. 81–82. Avner Offer posits a downward trend in women's status relative to wage rises wages rose, *The Challenge of Affluence*, pp. 233–70.
88. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London, 1992), pp. 1–18, Campbell and Coote, *Sweet Freedom*, p. 53.
89. The logic was as follows: 'Most working girls have as much, if not more, 'pocket-money' than the lads who are invariably expected ... to see the young lady safely home and provide the transport The girl that sits there supping drink after drink without reaching for her purse either thinks money grows on trees, or is just plain ungrateful!' *Singles*, 44 (January 1981), p. 5.
90. Ibid., p. 47 (April 1981), 25.
91. Strained relations between the sexes contemporaneous with or caused by women's liberation became a pet topic of the media in the 1970s. Guardian columnist Jill Tweedie

- drew attention to the intensity of the feeling sparked by the perceived change in dating etiquette, noting that at the heart of new dating strategies lay 'the roots of the anger between the sexes and many of the misunderstandings' *The Guardian*, 26 January 1982.
92. For a discussion of the contradictory expectations around women, motherhood and work emergent in the preceding decades, see Claire Langhamer, 'Feelings, Women and Work in the Long 1950s', *Women's History Review* (2016).
 93. *Singles*, 27 (August 1979), p. 6.
 94. *Ibid.*, p. 45 (February 1981), 4.
 95. *Ibid.*, p. 31 (December 1979), 4.
 96. *Ibid.*, p. 62 (July 1982), 18.
 97. *Ibid.*, p. 33 (February 1980), 5.
 98. *Ibid.*, p. 20 (January 1979), 9.
 99. *Ibid.*, p. 45 (February 1981), 5.
 100. *Ibid.*, p. 32 (January 1980), 10.
 101. *Ibid.*, p. 29 (October 1979), 24.
 102. *Ibid.*, p. 27 (August 1979), 15. Fiona Caine, the new problems columnist, recommended that this reader explore an Exceptional Needs Payment (ENP), by consulting the by Supplementary Benefits Handbook.
 103. *Ibid.*, p. 36 (May 1980), 5.
 104. *Ibid.*, p. 7 (October 1978), 9.
 105. *Ibid.*, p. 18 (November 1978), 9.
 106. Florence Suttcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Neo-Liberalism and Morality in the Making of Thatcherite Social Policy', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 511.
 107. *Singles*, 5 (October 1977), p. 6.
 108. Anxieties about the expense of dating women are present earlier in the 20th century; Langhamer has summarised the observations of Geoffrey Gorer and Ferdinand Zweig about the punitive cost of taking girls out even in the post-war years of employment, and nodded to the angry sentiment in print discussions of the topic, seething that 'girls want as much as they can get for as little as they can give'. Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 128–129. Beth Bailey has detailed the costs shouldered or refused by young dating men in 1930s, 40s and 50s America, alongside critiques of women's profligacy and materialism. Beth Bailey, *Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 57–76.
 109. *Singles*, 16 (September 1978), p. 7.
 110. *Ibid.*, p. 18 (November 1978), 8.
 111. *Ibid.*, p. 63 (August 1982), 45.
 112. *Ibid.*, p. 6 (November 1977), 8.
 113. *Ibid.*, p. 14 (July 1978), 29.
 114. *Ibid.*, p. 25 (June 1979), 12.
 115. One reader offered an alternative interpretation, reversing the relationship between traditional courtship and feminism proposed by the contributions discussed here. Had men's lacklustre courtship behaviour actually prompted the feminist movement? 'What has happened to the nice old-fashioned male who went after the female? Is it their passiveness that has brought about Women's Lib out of desperation?' *Ibid.*, p. 9 (February 1978), 7.
 116. Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991), p. 13.
 117. 'What has become increasingly clear is that one aspect in particular of our magazine captures the interest of the majority of our readers – our personal advertisement section', *Publisher's Letter*, *Ibid.*, p. 65 (September 1982), 3.
 118. Gough, *Understanding Women's Magazines*, pp. 26–39; Susan Faludi, *Backlash*.

119. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*; Zygmunt Bauman 'Liquid' series, especially *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge, 2003).
120. John Cockburn, *Lonely Hearts: Looking For Love Among The Small Ads* (London, 1988); Linda Sonntag, *Finding The Love of Your Life Using Dating Agencies and Ads* (London, 1988); Collette Sinclair, *Manhunt* (London, 1989), Paul Reizen, *Date Expectations: One Man's Journey Through the Lonely Hearts* (London, 2006).

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgements in particular to Claire Langhamer and Tom Stammers, as well as to Lucy Delap, Martin Francis and Tim Hitchcock.